

# The childcare revolution

**Transforming childcare is all about people and relationships, writes Sarah McDermott**



The childcare landscape is currently undergoing a period of significant change. This is in part due to the Scottish Government's programme of expansion around early learning and childcare, increasing the number of national entitlement hours to 1140 per year by 2020 for all three- and four-year-olds and eligible two year olds — almost double the current entitlement. Their priorities and plans for the expansion centre around four key themes, namely: quality, flexibility, affordability and accessibility.

At any time of change, it is important to find out what people affected by the decisions think. Children in Scotland is working with Glasgow City Council, Thriving Places Community Development team, and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health on CHANGE: Childcare and Nurture Glasgow East. The three-year project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, aims to establish a new model of childcare for children aged 0-12 based on the expressed needs of the community, and will create additional childcare places as part of the offer. Importantly, the project will explore creative solutions with a range of providers including nurseries, out of school care and childminders.

The project team seeks to work *with* people, not do things to them or their community. We recognise the value of community assets. Engagement work has already started, asking people what matters to them, then looking at how childcare could be used to achieve these aspirations. Children are also essential partners and we will be working with children and young people to explore their views, needs and priorities. We will evaluate children's perceptions of engaging with the project.

At six months in, the project team has engaged with parents, carers and professionals, and are beginning to see some key themes emerging from project work to date.

Families tell us the areas of quality, affordability, accessibility and flexibility are indeed important, and they have consistently been raised as priorities for parents and carers.

Flexibility, for example, is a particularly important area with learning about a nursery's opening hours and how provision is offered. Often, it is committed and dedicated staff who find ways to 'make it work', adapting to support families in a range of circumstances, rather than a system which works.

Aside from these core areas, a critical element is the value of relationships with practitioners. Having trusted, meaningful relationships where professionals adopt a more holistic approach, looking at families' lives and supporting

them in ways that make sense for each family, has been highlighted as valuable by families and practitioners alike. Practitioners who support families not just in their normal day-to-day duties, but to deal with adversity, build resilience and confidence, make a real difference to families' lives.

The emotional bonds of trusted, non-judgemental support are what builds a sense of community and provides a safe space for families to access support they otherwise may not have known about or accessed. The impact of these relationships appears to be invaluable, and is something parents look for, too. When asked about their hopes for a new nursery, one parent said, "I want it to be my second home".

The ways in which families access information is also important learning. Parents and carers have routinely stated they value information from people, including their peers, and online resources remain popular. The need for hard copies of information in public spaces such as libraries, health centres as well as nurseries and schools has also been consistently expressed. In order for this to happen, connections must be built and maintained, and lines of communication systematically upheld.

There is already rich learning from the project, but ultimately what is at its heart is people and relationships. The value of these transcends all levels – from the way in which leaders in the sector work with colleagues and partners, to how other providers work together; from how practitioners engage with supports and services in their communities, to the relationships providers build with families, and families in turn build with each other. At this time of change, not just within the childcare landscape but in Scotland and the UK more broadly, it is more important than ever for these relationships to be nurtured.

The CHANGE project has found advantages in the links in the community, thanks to the Thriving Places team, and benefitted hugely from the openness of the community. There is a real sense of people working together with a shared goal of strengthening the community, setting an example we would all benefit from adopting.

Ultimately solutions lie within people. Many of the challenges families face are common ones, and the more we can share with and learn from each other, the better off we will all be.

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*More information on the CHANGE: Childcare and Nurture, Glasgow East project can be found on our project pages [www.childreninScotland.org.uk/current-projects](http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk/current-projects)*

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